

Preventing Sexual Assault in Our Army Community

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Sexual Harassment/ Assault Response & Prevention

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Military communities are a tight knit group; especially on small bases such as Katterbach. There are hundreds of families living, working, attending school, and socializing within the gates of our community. It is easy to make friends, acquaintances, or have a general knowledge of all or most community members. Most people let their personal guard down and have an escalated sense of security and safety inside the gates of a military base. There are actions that community members can take to prevent and deter sexual assault from occurring without losing that sense of security. The most prominent of these actions are too; verbally acknowledge what you are uncomfortable with both physically and mentally, keep social acquaintances and interactions at an appropriate physical distance and conversations on publically acceptable subjects, and be aware of what friends or coworkers are conversating about.

One of the most important actions we can take in sexual assault prevention is to openly let people know where our personal boundaries lie. Although this might seem like an obvious point to make, sometimes the lines between acceptable and unacceptable behavior can blur or shrink as we get to know people better. The extent of our relationships with others relies heavily on physical and verbal cues given off by both parties. For example, think about a friend from home you have known for many years. Would you openly hug this person or call them by a nickname? Now, think about someone here you have just been introduced to. Would you hug this person or call them by another name? As you get better acquainted with this new person a relationship will develop but, both parties need to be aware of what type of relationship is developing. It is important to let the other person know if their jesters are getting too close to your line of comfort and to make sure that your own jesters are ok with that person.

Another point to keep in mind when meeting new people is to remember that cultural differences among people can dictate how they interact with others. Making physical contact, such as a hug, with someone who is not used to the action can be misleading. In the same manner verbal cues can incline affection, even if the vernacular is socially normal for some cultures. In most southern states it is common to hear a woman refer to others as sugar or honey but this is not common or acceptable in northern states or other countries. This is why it is important to keep social acquaintances and interactions at an appropriate physical distance and conversations on publically acceptable subjects. Once you become more familiar with an acquaintance, both parties will understand the type of relationship forming and more relaxed interactions will naturally occur without leading to implications. In the military community it is not uncommon for conversations to be on very personal topics, sometimes they become shockingly inappropriate. When this happens those areas of conversation have become public information and can lead to others creating assumptions about you, the meaning you had by letting that private information out, or even as far as to think there were hints in the conversation meant for them.

We must be aware of what friends or coworkers are conversating about, so that we know when it is time to step in and address an issue that might arise or stop ourselves before we go too far with a topic. Often time's people give verbal cues to physical intensions that can be addressed on the spot by those around them. If you here someone talking about another person more often than normal or the vernacular takes a dramatic change when speaking this can mean a person's feelings or thoughts for another have changed. It is important for us to address conversations about others that, although may be harmless to most participants, can lead other to think it is acceptable to take their actions further than just the conversation or that could be

misconstrued if overheard. Our peers and coworkers influence us more than we realize, and we confirm what is socially acceptable from what the majority of them are doing or saying.

Sometimes people need a reminder that having a conversation and carrying out actions related to conversation are two different levels of interaction.

Coworkers and friends in military communities have a much more relaxed and personal relationship than other industries. A lot of downtime in the military is spent conversating, joking, teasing and participating in sport-like activities. The more time people spend together the more comfortable they become with sharing personal information, the types of jokes told or the extent to which teasing goes. All too often these actions cross lines that are unacceptable to the general public. They might also cross the personal boundaries of people involved and that is when situations turn into legal cases. This is why it is important to always let people know when they have physically or verbally crossed our lines of comfort. It is also essential that we take a step back and asses how comfortable we have become with people. If our relationships with others are becoming unhealthy or inappropriate we have remind others of our boundaries in order to proactively prevent incidents from occurring. We also have to listen to others to ensure that their conversations are not turning to topics that could be inappropriate or lead to physical action.